

ARE WE DOING ANYTHING INTERESTING IN CLASS TODAY? INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES TO SPARK STUDENTS' INTEREST

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During each quarter, classes can fall into a repetitious pattern. To keep classes fresh and to engage the students' interest, I incorporate into my courses several innovative techniques that are alternatives to lecturing and that change the pace.

One activity that my students complete throughout the entire quarter is journals. The main objective of journals is to help students feel more comfortable with writing because many students feel that they cannot satisfactorily complete a writing assignment. By requiring students to write one full page on a variety of topics, they gain self-confidence in their writing abilities, so when they write an in-class essay or an exit essay exam, they know that they have something to say, no matter what the topics are. Also, since I do not grade the grammar and organization of the journal entries, the students feel better about trying some of the more uncommon organizational methods and lesser-used punctuation. Once students grow comfortable with these elements, some of these "new" writing and grammatical strategies appear in their essays.

Students receive a set of five journal topics every two weeks and complete a total of four sets of journals during the quarter. Each journal entry is worth five points, so each set of journal topics equals twenty-five points; therefore, with four sets of journals, the total assignment is worth one hundred points. The journals count five percent of the students' final grade.

Also, throughout the quarter I ask the students to assemble cut-up essays. I type an essay and take away the paragraphing and the transitions. I cut the essay into seven or eight parts (often where the specific details of the body paragraph begin), ask students to get into pairs, and assemble the essay into the proper order. Then, I put a copy of the essay in its proper order on the overhead, and as a class we discuss the contextual clues which led the students to assemble the essay in the order they did.

Assembling essays helps students to think about the flow and unity of a composition. Also, this activity can lead to good discussions about the transitions and specific details found in well-written essays.

To further encourage students to consider thoughtfully what they include in their essays, the students act out a "trial" based on a script that I provide. This trial is for a woman accused of murdering her husband. There are seven speaking parts, and I ask for students to volunteer for these roles while the rest of the students serve on the jury. I give the students with speaking parts a copy of the script that, as the students read it and act out the trial, presents evi-

dence against the defendant that seems overwhelming, including only the defendant's fingerprints found on the gun, the defendant and her husband recently got \$250,000 life insurance policies, and the next-door neighbor places the defendant at the scene of the crime at the time of the murder. The only defense offered is that the defendant claims she was at the dentist's office at the time of the murder. When the actors reach the end of the script, the trial is turned over to the jury members who reach a verdict. They jury presents its verdict of guilty (the script is written in such a way that the students definitely reach this decision), but then I tell the class that the defendant is actually innocent. As a class we discuss ways to prove her innocence.

This exercise reminds the students not to assume that the reader knows exactly what they are trying to communicate; they need to write in such a way as to make their points very clear to their reader.

The final, and most attention-grabbing activity, involves making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. To set up this activity, I tell students the following scenario: It's 3:00 a.m., and you are asleep. All of a sudden a bright light shines through your window and wakes you up. When you go into the backyard, you find an alien spacecraft and an alien who speaks English because he has monitored the earth's airwaves. The alien asks to spend the night, and you say yes. The next morning you have to go to class, and since you do not want the alien to go hungry, you leave the ingredients for and instructions on how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

I then ask the students to write the instructions on how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. After ten minutes I collect their instructions and ask a student to volunteer to read the papers as I act them out. I take the instructions very literally, and the results are often hilarious as I stab through the lids of the peanut butter and jelly jars and rip open the bag of bread.

This activity clearly demonstrates to students the need for details and not to assume that the reader knows exactly what the writer is trying to communicate.

Using these techniques in the classroom has proven to draw the students into the exercise and get across basic writing skills in such a way that students remember and implement these skills. *